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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3451  
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0680  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUL 9539  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6347  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1996  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1334  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 7017  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0325  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4485  
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1552  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAWJC/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [FR](#) [CO](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: COLOMBIA TOUTS HEROIC RESCUE SUCCESS OF HOSTAGES

REF: BOGOTA 2406

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Summary:  
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¶1. President Uribe touted the successful July 2 military rescue mission of the three Americans, Ingrid Betancourt, and eleven members of the Colombia security forces. He called on the FARC to release the remaining hostages and seek peace. The operation - planned for months - incurred no casualties and also resulted in the capture of First Front commander Gerardo Antonio Aguilar (Cesar) and Alexander Farfan (Enrique Gafas). Freed presidential candidate Ingrid Betnacourt called it a "perfect operation." Local politicians and analysts predict the operation will be a "mortal blow" against the FARC and boost Uribe's popularity ratings even higher. End Summary.

¶2. At a late evening press conference on July 2 with the freed hostages and military officials, President Uribe praised Colombian security forces involved in the rescue as "heroes of humanity." He said the operation - planned for months - showed the military's respect for human rights. He called on the FARC to release the 25 political hostages and 700 other hostages that it continues to hold and urged the group to seek peace. Army Commander General Mario Montoya said the operation was risky and could have "made fools of ourselves" but ultimately worked like clockwork. He said Colombian military intelligence's "infiltration" of the FARC's communications was instrumental to the operation's success.

¶3. Colombian press reported that at 1:13 pm on July 2, Colombian military (Colmil) helicopters landed near a FARC camp 70 kilometers south of San Jose del Guaviare. Six soldiers and two pilots, disguised as international aid workers, told First Front commander Cesar and Enrique Gafas that they would be escorted to another location to meet FARC senior commander Alfonso Cano. The fifteen hostages--accompanied by the two FARC commanders--boarded the helicopter. Once the helicopter was airborne, Colombian military intelligence personnel overpowered the two FARC and identified themselves to the hostages. Ingrid Betancourt said the helicopter "almost fell from the sky as the hostages jumped with joy. "Operation Jacque" (meaning checkmate in

Spanish) lasted 22 minutes until Cesar and Gafas were seized - without a single casualty. At 5:08 pm, the hostages arrived at Catam military base in Bogota.

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Ingrid Betancourt Calls It a "Perfect" Operation  
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¶4. At her first press conference following the rescue, Ingrid Betancourt called the operation "perfect" and thanked President Uribe, the Colombian military, and French president Nicolas Sarkozy. She acknowledged the efforts of Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to achieve her freedom, but she insisted that they "must respect Colombian democracy." Betancourt said Uribe's reelection in 2006 was key to maintaining the military pressure on the FARC which led to her liberation, noting the FARC had exploited previous changes of government to rebuild its military capacity. She repeatedly praised the Colombian military, identifying herself as a soldier, and said "this army will take us to peace." Betancourt also called on FARC leaders Alfonso Cano and Mono Jojoy not to punish her guards, adding that they were deceived in the operation.

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International Praise  
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¶5. French President Sarkozy lauded the rescue alongside Betancourt's children in Paris, thanked President Uribe, and reiterated the GOF's offer to provide asylum to FARC members who "renounced the armed struggle." President Chavez said "the time for rifles is gone" and voiced his willingness to work to obtain the release of more hostages and to achieve peace in Colombia. OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza said, "this is the most important Colombian government success in the struggle to pacify its country, not only because of the freeing of the hostages but because Colombia is closer to a real peace." Interpol's Secretary General called the operation a key turning point in the fight against terrorism in the region. Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos echoed that the FARC is in a "weakened state without leaders and without the possibility of a military way out."

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Domestic Jubilation  
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¶6. The Colombian public was ecstatic over the operation's success. Local security analyst Alfredo Rangel described the operation as a "mortal blow for the FARC" and predicted that it would further Uribe's already high approval ratings to sky-high levels. Catholic Bishops Conference President Augusto Castro called the operation a triumph for President Uribe and Colombia's military, while opposition Liberal Party presidential candidate Rafael Pardo noted that the operation freed Uribe from international pressure to negotiate a humanitarian exchange accord with the FARC. The opposition Polo Democratico Party issued a communique welcoming the "liberation of the hostages, and urging the "insurgent groups to reflect on the sterility of the armed struggle."

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